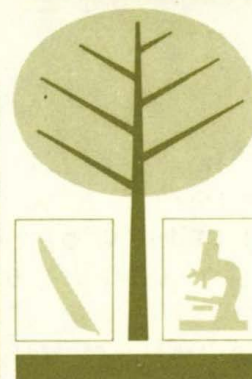
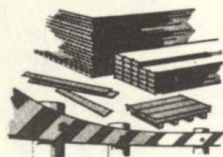


FORESTRY SCIENCE IN THE SERVICE OF MAN



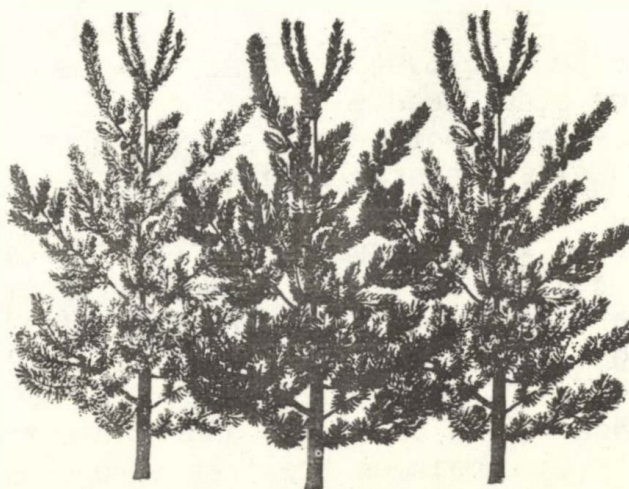
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FOREST
PRODUCTS MARKETING

Christmas Tree Trends

The Christmas tree industry has experienced a sizeable growth and many changes in the past two decades. About 45 million trees will be displayed in American homes, businesses, schools, and churches during this year's Yule celebration--15 million more than in the late 1940's! More trees are coming from planned, planted, and well-managed Christmas tree farms than from nature's own wild lands. And Scotch pine has captured the hearts of most Christmas tree buyers. Following in favor are Douglas fir, balsam fir, black spruce, and red cedar.



U.S.D.A. Forest Service economists of the "Industrial Opportunities" Work Unit at the Forest Products Marketing Laboratory, Princeton, W. Va., are keeping abreast of such trends in the Christmas tree market. Economist Gil Dempsey's staff is presently conducting studies to determine the tree-buying habits of America's 50 million families in order to keep growers and distributors informed of their wants. Research of this type will insure that tree lots during the Christmas season can offer supplies of Christmas trees of the right species, quality, and size.

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The inability of growers and distributors to estimate the size of their market accurately is a crucial problem in Christmas tree production. Being unaware of how many trees can be sold during the Christmas season, they frequently cut and offer for sale either too many or too few. The result is a shortage of trees in some areas and a surplus in others, representing a waste in excess of \$10 million dollars.

What have researchers learned so far about the habits of the Christmas tree buyer? For one thing, the tree's appearance, rather than local and family tradition, is the consumer's most important basis for selecting a tree. Recently buyers have shown a preference for sheared, well-shaped trees, even though the wild, unkempt kind may be the traditional tree of their area. This is borne out by the fact that sales of wild, eastern red cedar in one city in the Southeast, where that tree had long been a favorite, dropped 35 percent in just one year. The reason: the wild, eastern red cedar just could not compete with the well-groomed plantation pines and firs that appeared on the local mart.

Buyers also select trees on the basis of size, fullness, straightness of stem, needle retention capacity, color, and freshness. The six-to-eight-foot tree has great appeal among homeowners, while apartment dwellers prefer smaller ones.

Even though more than a quarter of the tree is usually out of sight against a wall or hidden in a corner, most buyers pick trees that are symmetrical and uniformly full all around. They require straight-trunked trees to facilitate placing in a stand.

Housewives generally appreciate trees whose needles have the ability to remain on the tree throughout the holiday season. Freshly cut, fragrant, healthy green trees appeal on this basis. Needle length, stiffness, and sharpness also play a role at selection time. Buyers generally find medium-length needles most acceptable.

Buyers are also choosy about where they buy their tree. They usually patronize lots that are conveniently located and have good facilities. This accounts for why Christmas tree lots, located on heavily travelled streets or in commercial areas, with convenient parking facilities, and trees neatly displayed, sell the most trees.

In their investigations Forest Service economists are not ignoring the consumer who buys an artificial Christmas tree. They estimate that between 4 and 6 million artificial trees are sold each year. Economy, convenience, and appearance are the reasons usually given for buying a plastic and metal replica of the natural tree. The Princeton Laboratory staff will continue investigations into the habits of the artificial tree user, so that the competitive relationship between real and artificial trees can be better understood.



When you visit a retail Christmas tree lot, you will, no doubt, want to purchase a good Christmas tree -- one that is fresh and appealing to the eye. Of course, size, shape, and kind of tree will also be important to you.

Forecast for New Types

If variety is the spice of life, Americans may have a heyday at Christmas tree buying time in the years ahead. On each lot there could be new types to choose from, in addition to the established favorites. A new cooperative research program -- the Foreign Seed Exchange of the Forest Service -- hopes to introduce some new and better strains into the American market for future Yuletide holidays.

Washington Office personnel of the Forest Service, U. S. Department of Agriculture, contacted evergreen producers in a number of foreign countries. They found men anxious to get American seeds and willing to trade their own. Sites in Kentucky and North Carolina now serve as testing grounds for imported seeds from the eastern Mediterranean area and Asia.

One imported species is the Taiwanese cryptomeroides, a distinctive tree in Taiwan. Berea, Ky., Research Forester Russ Walters describes it, "One of the most beautiful trees I've ever known." Quite tall, with long flowing branches, it could make an excellent festive ornament.

Pastel Painted Evergreens

Scotch Pine is the favorite American Christmas tree. More Scotch Pines are marketed and sold from retail lots for the holidays than any other evergreen.



The Scotch Pine

Its prevalence may be due to the fact that Scotch Pine -- dubbed the "grower's tree" -- is the easiest evergreen to raise. It is hardy, helps stabilize sandy soils, and grows well in many areas. In addition, it responds well to mechanical shearing. This produces the conical shape most appealing to Christmas tree buyers.

But, several types of Scotch Pine have the bad habit of turning yellow when the weather gets cold. With holiday festivities only weeks away, this can be disastrous. After all, who wants a yellow Christmas tree?

Research foresters at the Northeastern Forest Experiment Station at Berea, Ky., suggest painting to keep Scotch Pine crops, which might otherwise be unusable for the Yuletide, appealing. Trees can be colored lively pastels -- pinks,

blues, and whites -- as well as natural greens, before they have a chance to turn yellow. Studies by Berea scientists show August of the harvest year the best time for painting.

A gallon of latex-based colorant, diluted in water, can cover 60 trees. It is the same substance that maintains the rich green on golf courses and football fields. A tractor-operated device can spray the paint on six rows of cultivated trees at a time. The cost: only about 10¢ per tree.